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JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

BRIEFS

CALL ONGOING FOR RODEO VOLUNTEERS

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — Volunteers are still needed for a special ministry opportunity at the Dixie National Livestock and Rodeo Show currently underway in Jackson. Continuing through Feb. 19, the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) evangelism department will host a booth at the Equine Expo located in the Trade Mart at the Fairgrounds on High Street. At the booth in 2016, Mississippi Baptist volunteers shared Christ with 1,115 people. Volunteers are needed to staff the booth on Feb. 16-18 from 9 a.m.-6:30 p.m., and on Feb. 19 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Volunteers usually work two-hour shifts. To volunteer, contact MBCB evangelism director Don Lum at (601) 292-3278. E-mail: lburns@mbcb.org.

WCU GOLF TOURNEY BENEFITS STUDENTS

HATTIESBURG, Ms. (Special) — Four Hattiesburg-area golf courses are teaming up to stage a March 3 multi-course benefit for students who lost their belongings Jan. 21 on the Hattiesburg campus of Baptist-affiliated William Carey University when it was heavily damaged by a powerful EF-3 tornado. The golf courses are Canebreak, Hattiesburg County Club, Shadow Ridge, and Timber-ton. Play will begin with a shotgun start at noon. Lunch is provided. Sponsors and single entries for the tourney are currently being accepted, and a large number of volunteers will be needed on the day of the tourney due to the expansive scope of the event. For more information, contact Dick Vogel, senior project manager, WCU Office for Advancement, WCU Box 141, 498 Tuscan Avenue, Hattiesburg, MS 39401. Telephone: (601) 297-1429. E-mail: dvogel@wmcarey.edu.

WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY

Battered school back in business

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP and local reports) — William Carey University (WCU) will move students back to its Hattiesburg campus and begin the spring trimester less than a month after an EF-3 tornado damaged nearly all of its 30 buildings on Jan. 21.

Five buildings will have to be demolished, according to a Feb. 6 university news release, but several classroom buildings and housing for 739 students will open Feb. 20.

Amid the cleanup and rebuilding effort, 12 other colleges and universities either have made or plan to make financial donations to William Carey, the university told Baptist Press in an email. Six of those institutions are affiliated with Baptist state conventions that partner with the Southern Baptist Convention. WCU is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

"The support of sister institutions is a source of strength and encouragement to come back stronger," WCU president Tommy King told Baptist Press (BP) in written comments. "Prayer support, as well as financial and student assistance will make a huge difference. I have heard from many other institutions that plan to send support."

Among the institutions contributing is Union University in Jackson, Tenn., which is affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist



ON THE GROUND — A building at William Carey University in Hattiesburg that housed an art gallery and apartments is one of five campus structures slated for demolition following a EF-3 tornado Jan. 21 that caused widespread damage across the Hattiesburg/Petal area in Forrest County. (BP photo courtesy of William Carey University)

Convention and suffered massive tornado damage of its own in 2008.

Union will collect financial donations for WCU at all remaining home basketball games this season and on at least three

other occasions, Union told BP in an email.

Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver has said he will visit WCU in March and present the university with a check.

"From the moment we heard

about the tornado at William Carey, we began praying," Oliver told BP in written comments. "Having experienced the devastation of a storm such

see WCU on p. 8

Gorsuch gains conservative favor

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — Religious liberty and pro-life advocates have welcomed U.S. President Donald Trump's Jan. 31 nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court, as the Senate prepares for what is expected to be a hard-fought confirmation battle.



GORSUCH

Trump announced his selection of Gorsuch, 49, a federal appeals court judge from Colorado, to fill the seat created by the death of Associate Justice Antonin Scalia last February.

In Gorsuch, an Episcopalian, Trump nominated a judge

who — like Scalia, a Roman Catholic — has a philosophy and record of interpreting the Constitution and laws based on its original meaning and their text, respectively.

If confirmed, Gorsuch would be the only Protestant on the court. The other eight justices are either Jewish or Roman Catholic.

A judge for the last 10 years on the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, Gorsuch agreed with others on the court that the Obama administration's abortion/contraception mandate violated the free exercise of religious rights of Hobby Lobby and Little Sisters of the Poor among other religious groups.

Although he apparently has not ruled on abortion rights, Gorsuch wrote a 2006 book ti-

tled, *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia*, before becoming a judge, arguing against legalization of the end-of-life practices. Based on his judicial philosophy, however, Gorsuch has pledged to apply the law rather than his beliefs.

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, called Gorsuch "an exceptional choice."

"I heartily support President Trump's excellent appointment. [Gorsuch] is a brilliant and articulate defender of Constitutional originalism in the mold of the man he will replace: Justice Antonin Scalia. His career is one that exemplifies the very best

see GORSUCH on p. 9

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Another wrong turn

When I write about the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), I write as the son of an Eagle Scout, the brother of an Eagle Scout, the uncle of an Eagle Scout, and an Eagle Scout myself. I once wrote those words and said those words with pride, but no more.

In recent years I have watched with a progressively breaking heart as the leadership of that once-great American institution, beloved by so many for generations, has chosen over and over to cave to the ways of the world and forsake its moral and ethical base.

Gone are the days when we took the Scout Oath so seriously that I can still recall it verbatim 50 years after I first committed it to memory: *On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.*

The Scout Law was a lofty goal toward which we strived every day: *A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.*

Oh, the Oath and the Law are still in place but what do those lofty ideals mean in modern scouting? Not much, apparently.

"Starting today, we will accept and register youth in the Cub and Boy Scout programs based on the gender identity indicated on the application. Our organization's local councils will help find units that can provide for the best interest of the child," the Jan. 30 press release from BSA announced.

The press release closed with the promise to remain "true to our core values, outlined in the Scout Oath and Law."

It appears BSA leaders fail to see the obvious contradiction between those two state-

ments. How can the organization remain true to its core values, namely expecting participants to do their duty to God, while encouraging a sexually confused, 13-year-old girl to deny her God-ordained gender and setting about to train her to do something God never intended?

This latest outrage follows the January 2014 lifting of the prohibition on accepting boys for membership who openly practice a homosexual lifestyle, and the July 2015 decision to allow avowed homosexual men to serve as adult leaders for BSA local troops.

As to the teenaged, biologically male scouts who have begun the long, hard trek to a manhood of character and integrity, what lessons will they learn from these decisions? Certainly not the lessons I learned, my brother learned, my father learned, my nephew learned, and the 2.25 million other Eagle Scouts learned since the first Eagle Award was earned in 1912.

The truly sad part is BSA all along has had the constitutional right to set its own policies regarding membership because it is a private organization entitled to freedom of assembly (also known as freedom of association). Numerous state and federal courts have ruled thusly, including the U.S. Supreme Court which put the issue to bed in 2000 (*Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*).

The bottom line is that the Boy Scouts didn't have to take these extreme, politically-correct measures. The organization's craven leadership has simply bowed to sexual special interest groups time and again, leaving the boys involved to try to figure out for themselves what it means to be "morally straight," and "reverent," and all the rest, as codified in the new BSA regulations.

It was difficult enough to work all that out in the old days when Boy Scouts actually had standards. Now...

Into the pit

Have you ever found yourself in a well of discouragement? If so, you are in good company. Most biblical Heroes of the Faith experienced discouragement as they followed the Lord.

The well of discouragement engulfed King David as Saul sought to kill him. Job went down into the well after losing his possessions, friends, and family. The persistent complaining of the Hebrews drove Moses into the well of discouragement. The Apostle Paul descended into the well when the churches he founded began to falter. Nehemiah, too, was acquainted with the interior walls of the well. Perhaps no other saint expressed his or her feelings of discouragement as pointedly as Jeremiah.

All of these great Heroes of the Faith experienced real discouragement. Most of the Godly men and women I know today have spent their share of time in the deep well of discouragement, too.

When God moves in a mighty way, we had better brace ourselves for a discouraging attack from Satan. We must expect something discouraging to follow our victories for Christ. The attack will be orchestrated to stir up confusion and discourage us.

Situations that throw us into the well of discouragement leave us shaking our heads and asking: *Where did that come from? Why are they upset and leaving the church? How can they believe such a rumor? What do these people want from me, a miracle worker?*

We can respond in different ways after an attack. We can waste valuable time trying to understand it all, let the attack jolt our confidence, burst forth with prideful counter-attacks, or participate in counter-productive conversations. However, none of these reactions yields good results for others or ourselves.

Always remember your worth is not defined by someone's opinion of you. Satan's plan is to destroy you and leave you hopeless. If you are a man or woman committed to serving the Lord, you must prepare yourself for attacks designed to discourage. Do not be shocked when they come.

Here are a few suggestions to help you get out of the deep well of discouragement:

■ **Examine yourself.** Use 1 Timothy 1:5 to examine your motives. Do you have a pure heart of love for all, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith?



Softer Side

with Cindy Townsend

■ **Ask the question,** "What is God doing in my situation and what is Satan trying to destroy?"

■ **Claim Paul's prison perspective** from Phil. 4:6: If you don't worry and if you pray about it all, God will give peace that will guard your heart.

■ **Look to God as your source of encouragement.** God often sends balcony people to cheer us on when we are discouraged, but there will come a time when the encouragement that God provides will be the only encouragement that satisfies. Just as King David encouraged himself in the Lord when all the people wanted to stone him, recovery from the well of discouragement gives you a confidence in Christ ALONE.

■ **Praise and pray from a place of faith, not feelings.** The Lord's goodness will take you beyond feelings to a place of complete faith in Him. By faith, you find peace in knowing the Lord God is in control. With time, praise and prayer will restore your enthusiasm to carry on despite the circumstances and even in the midst of attack.

The deep well of discouragement is a pit we will all experience if we follow the Lord long enough, so if you're reading this article while experiencing encouraging times, please file this away in a safe place. One day you will likely encounter the well of discouragement and need these words to give you hope in your despair and point you to find the kind of encouragement that can only be found in the Lord. There is no doubt that we can become resilient overcomers through times of discouragement as we abide in Him.

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Dead Sea Scrolls cave stirs excitement

JERUSALEM (BP and local reports) — A major discovery related to the Dead Sea Scrolls has been announced — a cave where some of the ancient scrolls once were placed.

According to scholars, a Jewish sect known as the Essenes around the time of Jesus hid their scrolls in the desert caves of cliffs along the Dead Sea near Qumran in the West Bank. The first of the caves was entered in the late 1940s by a young Bedouin goat-herder.

Archaeologists previously listed 11 caves where Dead Sea Scrolls texts had been found. Now there's a 12th cave, according to an excavation led by Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Liberty University in Virginia. However, the new cave was looted during the mid-20th century and its scrolls taken.

The Liberty University contingent was led by Randall Price, distinguished research professor and curator of the Liberty Biblical Museum on the school's campus in Lynchburg.

Lamar Cooper, senior professor of Old Testament and archaeology at Criswell College in Dallas, was among the excavation participants. Cooper, who was on site from Dec. 28 through Jan. 13, helped catalog artifacts found in the cave.

Oren Gutfeld, a researcher at Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology, told The Washington Post after the Feb. 8 announcement, "It is the first time in 60 years we have the first evidence of a new scroll cave."

Although no new scrolls were found, the cave abounded with other artifacts. "Thank God they took only the scrolls," Gutfeld told The Post. "They left behind all the evidence that the scrolls were there."

Based on the contents of the cave in the Qumran region northwest of the Dead Sea, the



CONFIRMING HISTORY — Israeli and U.S. excavation team members work to uncover artifacts and confirmation that what is now called the 12th Dead Sea Scrolls cave is an authentic addition to the previous discoveries that began in the 1940s. (BP photo courtesy of Lamar Cooper)

excavation team determined that local Bedouins looted it for any scrolls and other antiquities. The team did discover broken jars and lids, fragments of scroll wrappings, a string that tied the scrolls, and a piece of worked leather that had been part of a scroll.

Cooper participated in his first excavation in Israel in 1969 and began working on Qumran excavations in 2006 at the invitation of Liberty University's Price.

"When I went through seminary, I listened to all of the things that were told me by scholars — some of whom didn't hold Scripture in very

high regard," Cooper said. "When I got to Israel, all of [the discoveries] showed me that what is in the Bible is true, because what we were bringing out of the ground were things that relate to the Bible."

Cooper is a former pastor and music minister. He holds two degrees from New Orleans Seminary: a Th.M. with honors (1969) and a Th.D. in Old Testament (1975). He also holds a B.A. in Bible (1963) from Baptist-affiliated Louisiana College in Pineville.

Cooper noted that in addition to the monumental step the new cave affords for Dead Sea Scrolls research, its significance is im-

portant to a college like Criswell that was founded on the primacy and inerrancy of Scripture.

Criswell College was founded by First Church, Dallas, in 1970 "to provide biblical teaching for lay people that would be both intellectually and spiritually sound," according to the school's web site. It became affiliated with the Southern Baptists of Texas state convention in 2001.

"Because we stand strong on the Bible — the authenticity of Scripture — it's been a thrill for me to be associated with everybody who works here because we all believe that the Bible is the Word of God... [E]very dig

that I've gone to tells me more and more that everything that happened at that place is what the Bible says," said Cooper, who has served as Criswell's dean of graduate studies, vice president for academic affairs, executive vice president and provost, and two separate tenures as interim president.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, according to Liberty University's divinity school website, are "the greatest manuscript discovery of all time. They include the oldest copy of the biblical text and sectarian writings that inform us of religious life and practice in the time before and during the life of Jesus."

Assisted suicide bill snuffed in Mississippi Senate

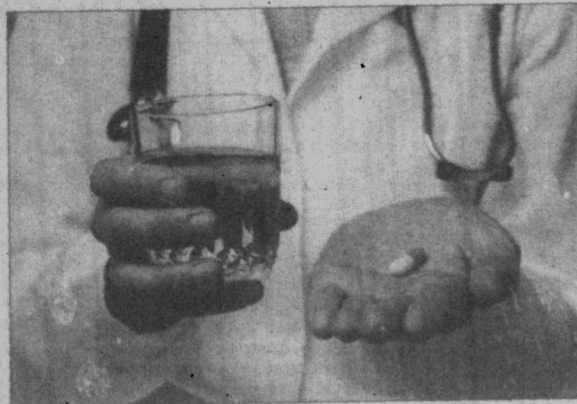


Photo by Caaba Deli/Shutterstock.com

SANTA FE, N.M. (BP and local reports) — A bill filed in the 2017 regular session of the Mississippi Legislature to legalize assisted suicide died when it was not reported out of the Public Health and Welfare Committee of the Senate.

As stated in the Death with Dignity Act (Senate Bill 2283), filed by Senators Robert L. Jackson of Marks and Deborah J. Dawkins of Pass Christian, the bill would have allowed "terminally ill Mississippians to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, expressly prescribed by a physician for that purpose."

Legislators in as many as 15 U.S. states have had recent pro-

posals filed to legalize assisted suicide, with a leading patients' rights group flagging bills in New Mexico and Hawaii as particularly concerning.

In addition to Mississippi, New Mexico, and Hawaii, the other states considering assisted suicide are Arizona, Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Wyoming, according to the Patients Rights Council (PRC), a Steubenville, Oh., group that opposes assisted suicide legislation.

The number of states with assisted suicide proposals on the table is up from 13 last year but down from 25 in 2015. In all, 36 states and the District of

Columbia have considered assisted suicide bills since 1994, according to PRC data.

Physician-assisted suicide is already legal in California, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Vermont and Washington state.

In New Mexico, the End of Life Options Act (House Bill 171) would allow doctors, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants to diagnose terminal illness and prescribe life-ending medication the same day with no second opinion.

Five assisted suicide bills have been introduced by Hawaii legislators, with one (Senate Bill 357) not requiring a second opinion to confirm a terminal illness; diagnosis before life-ending drugs are prescribed.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us early on what Kingdom people are going to be like. In verse 13, He says, "Ye are the salt of the earth." In verse 14, He says, "Ye are the light of the world." Simply stated, these two wonderful parts of ancient living are used to characterize who we are supposed to be. We are to be salty and beaming.

He tells us in these two verses if we are not like that, something has happened. If we're not salty — one of the great, special spices of life — then something has happened to the salt that has caused it to lose flavor. If we are not beaming, maybe somebody has put us under a basket and while we could be making a difference, the darkness seems to be ruling. Jesus calls on us to be salty, beaming people in a world that is filled with tasteless experiences and dark events. You show up and let the Lord shine and flavor your world.

Salt was such a valuable commodity in Jesus' day that at times it was used for money. Soldiers were often paid with salt. It's even from that usage that the word, "salary," has come. You see, salt is a taste changer. It has extraordinary value, and it has great impact. Put salt on anything — tomatoes, eggs, chips, or popcorn — and you will know it by the intense taste. It is a quality of spice that changes anything it touches and raises our senses whenever we taste it.

Sometimes we who are the children of God have presented ourselves with such somberness that people have cause to wonder where in the world Jesus ever got the idea that we would be flavorful people. I think about a lady who years ago was being encouraged to become a Christian, and while she was somewhat interested,



Directions

With Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Salty and Beaming

she replied, "No, no. I'm sad enough as it is." The fact is that she had come to believe Christians were not supposed to be salty, spicy, taste-changers and capable of adding an extra, positive dimension to life.

Jesus said we are supposed to be beaming as though we are a source of bright light emanating into a dark world. When you stop and think about light, you think about all of the things that it does for us. While for Jesus in His day only a small, little candle would change the atmosphere of a room in the middle of the darkness at night, we have bright lights that can be seen for miles and miles.

The principle is still the same. Light gives distinction to things that would otherwise be in the darkness. Whenever we start getting to the warm days of spring, I get more concerned about going out and walking early in the morning when it's still dark because I can't see if some snake gets out

there on the road. For me, just personally, I'd rather not step on that dude. Light helps us see more clearly. It enables us to have direction and it brings about a new delight in our lives. Turn the lights on.

How are we supposed to be salty and beaming in this old world? Well, it comes about from what Jesus tells us: because of an intimacy, a personal intimacy, with our God. We can have that close relationship with Him that is authentic and real that in turn shapes our lives, and not just a personality quick but something that brings about a saltiness and a beaming nature that could only come because we have spent time with a God who makes a difference in our lives.

When you read in the Sermon on the Mount that we're to be salty and beaming, you need to realize that the end result is we make an impact on this world. We touch those people who live in another kingdom, the kingdom without Christ. Not only do

we make a difference in their world, we are literally to find our way into that world, to dive into their world, and bring about saltiness and brightness.

Jesus taught us to love those who do not know the Lord. We in the church have a tendency to love who we love and feel close to those who feel close to us, but our salt and light is meant to specifically make a difference in those who don't know where they are and who they are. We are to love them and show them a world that is truly different because of our relationship with Christ. It is to be intentional — living in a dark, tasteless world and yet being on mission to bring about the substance of who He is and what He has entrusted to us.

Have you ever known of a tasteless, gloomy Christian? Before you answer that, ask yourself if you have ever been that person. It seems as though Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was talking to people who had experienced not being salty and beaming, and He was desiring to equip them, enable them, and fill their lives with spiciness and shining brilliance to the point where at least some time during the day in some way people around them might see a spark, a glimpse, or get a taste of something that is truly wonderful. It all comes from Jesus.

Today let the Lord have His way in you to bring about a new taste in the places and in the relationships where you are, that people will recognize the Lord is here. Wherever you are, don't let the darkness rule because you are the light and the darkness cannot keep the light from shining.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

Staff Changes



RIVERPORT CHURCH, GREENVILLE, welcomed new pastor Butch Nowlin and his wife Patricia.



FIRST CHURCH, CALHOUN CITY, welcomed Wade Lee as minister of youth. Congratulating him is pastor Mike Smith.

In other Staff Changes:

► Tommy Winders, pastor, Carrollton Church, Carrollton, Ala., is retiring and moving back to the Tupelo area. He can be contacted at (662) 231-5553 or tjwinders2346@gmail.com.

Katherine Odum Clawson, 91, former Southern Baptist missionary, passed away Feb. 10 at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg. Funeral service was Feb. 13 at Cartersville Church in Petal, with interment at Roseland Park Cemetery in Hattiesburg. After graduating from Louisiana College in Pin-

eville, she married William M. Clawson in 1946. They both attended New Orleans Seminary, where she earned a masters of religious education degree. The Clawsons were called to serve with the Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission

Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention, as missionaries to Mexico from 1953-1966. They moved to Hattiesburg where she taught Spanish in Hattiesburg Public Schools. She was an active member of Cartersville Church. She was preceded in death by her

husband, her parents, Charles T. and Viola Brinson Odum, and eleven siblings. She is survived by a son, William Arthur (Sandra Polly Johnson) Clawson of Temple, Texas; two daughters, Kathy (David L.) Smith of Pearl, and Mary Elizabeth Clawson of Bay

Spring; and four grandchildren. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and the William and Kathryn Clawson Scholarship Fund at William Carey University. Hulet-Winstead Funeral Home in Hattiesburg was in charge of arrangements.

BIBL i O C I P H E R

MR XLI PMTW SJ LMQ XLEX LEXL
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JSYRH; FYX E VSH MW JSV XLI FEGO
SJ LMQ XLEX MW ZSMH SJ
YRHIVWXERHMRK.
TVSZIVFW XIR: XLMVXIIR

Clue: Z = V

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 20:46

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

OBITUARY



PRAYER FOR PLANTERS — Kevin Ezell (right), president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), closes out a time of prayer for church planters as NAMB trustees gathered at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, Ca., for a dinner to celebrate church planting work in California and the West region on the eve of their Feb. 7 meeting. (BP photo courtesy of NAMB)

NAMB 'ministry hubs' announced to trustees

ONTARIO, Ca. (BP) — Trustees of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) meeting in Southern California heard reports from local church planters and approved the establishment of three Send Relief "ministry hubs" that will provide mercy ministry and give Southern Baptists more opportunities for hands-on missions service.

Meeting Feb. 7 for their full board meeting, trustees approved a plan for NAMB to purchase existing property that will be transitioned into the ministry hubs. A Clarkston, Ga., hub will be located in Clarkston International Bible Church; in Memphis, Leewood Church will serve as a hub; and a property in Ashland, Ky., will be a hub for Appalachia ministry work.

The trustee action grants NAMB the authority to move forward with the transition of these properties. Churches will still meet at the Clarkston and Memphis locations.

"These ministry hubs will serve their surrounding areas and become a destination for Southern Baptists who want to send mission teams," NAMB Send Relief vice president David Melber told trustees. "If these go well, they will become models for launching additional hubs throughout North America."

Melber said the ministry hubs outside of Atlanta will also house equipment and supplies to be deployed in times of disaster, allowing for a quicker response for urgent needs.

The night before, NAMB trustees gathered at nearby Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention in Ontario to celebrate church planting in greater Los Angeles and throughout the West region. Planters from throughout California shared reports from their ministry and trustees gathered around each of them for prayer.

NAMB president Kevin Ezell told the planters, "The reason these people [trustees] have left their families and come to this place is to invest in NAMB and make sure you have what you need and let you know that they have your back."

Gateway Seminary president Jeff Iorg shared the story of how the school transitioned its primary operations from the San Francisco area to Ontario and some of the ways God provided throughout that process. One example is an \$850,000 unsolicited gift to be used for training church planters that came to the seminary. The gift came just a few months after Iorg announced the school's relocation.

"In the past three years we have given 404 church planters scholarship money to go to seminary to help feed the pipeline you need to get church planters into the church planting positions you have," Iorg told trustees.

In his report to trustees, Ezell shared a Pray for Planters initiative that NAMB will be championing throughout 2017 the goal of enlisting 10,000 Southern Baptist churches to

pray for church planters and other missionaries.

"It doesn't cost a church anything to pray and we are just asking that they commit to prayer," Ezell said. "It's the very first step in church planting, and every church can participate."

A website for the initiative where churches can log their prayer commitment will be launched March 1 at namb.net/pray.

Ezell shared about progress in NAMB's continuing efforts to strengthen and build Southern Baptist church planting efforts. Church planter assessment centers are now present in 20 cities across the United States and Canada. A new church planter reporting system will track the progress of church plants in key areas and provide reports for NAMB and other funding partners.

NAMB will conduct three church planter orientations this year, two for planters in Send Cities and one for planters serving outside of Send City areas.

In evangelism, Ezell shared that NAMB is continuing its Engage 24 workshops for pastors. The noon-to-noon, pastor-led events equip pastors with tools and ideas for church-wide evangelism initiatives. A new Three Circles church kit helps pastors train members how to turn conversations toward Jesus.

In June, NAMB is partnering with Harvest America to bring the Crossover Crusade to Phoenix on June 11 prior to the SBC annual meeting.

El Paso bar sees a remarkable transformation

SAN ELIZARIO, Texas (BP) — An El Paso-area church, Iglesia Bautista Dios con Nosotros (God with Us Baptist Church), withstood opposition from alleged drug traffickers and credit the protection of God for the expansion of their presence in a strip shopping center in San Elizario, a city of 5,000 in El Paso County.

Iglesia Bautista Dios con Nosotros, translated in English as God with Us Baptist Church, quickly outgrew the small space rented in 2012, so they expanded the storefront. Within a few years, they again needed more room but the owner of Amigos Bar at the opposite end of the strip center had other ideas.

He wanted them off the property entirely. "The bar owner said that he did not care for us to be there, even if we were a church," pastor Marcos Jacinto recounted. Jacinto said he replied to the bar owner, "Do what you need to do. God is with us."

The owner indicated he knew a lot of people in town who could do something against the church to force them to leave. Chuy Avila, church planting associate with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, told the Southern Baptist TEXAN, the weekly news journal of the convention.

Undeterred, the congregation continued to hold church services, unaware that El Paso County sheriff's deputies as well as FBI and DEA agents were conducting a lengthy investigation into alleged drug trafficking activities at Amigos Bar and other sites in San Elizario and nearby Socorro and Clint.

The El Paso Times reported that on June 22, 2016, law enforcement agents armed with search warrants recovered weap-

ons, cocaine, and cash from the properties. Amigos Bar was closed. Its owner eventually arrested with others.

Amigos Bar was no longer a threat, but Dios con Nosotros continued to desperately need additional space. The answer came in an unexpected way as Jacinto and Sunday School teachers began praying for a solution during a meeting last fall.

"As we prayed, we heard a knock at the door," Jacinto said. "It was the owner of the shopping center. He came to offer us the bar space but we couldn't afford to pay rent on something so big."

When the church leaders hesitated, the shopping center owner asked them to come to his office the following day. "He made us an offer of half what the bar paid," Jacinto said. "His exact words were, 'As soon as you sign the contract, this place will be yours.'"

Church members began transforming the 3,000-square-foot-plus former bar into a church. The first services in the new facility were held the weekend before Christmas and attracted many from the neighborhood.

"They had a full house for three days of services," Avila said. "People wanted to know what was going on inside." Avila recalled the smell of the bar was still pretty strong in that first service, but has since vanished.

Jacinto said the choice of the San Elizario area for the church was deliberate. "We had spent some time praying for guidance, seeking for a place to begin. The Lord gave us this place and the rent was accommodating. Also, we felt that we could relate with the people since we were part of the same culture and economic status."



EXPANDING CHURCH — Members of Iglesia Bautista Dios con Nosotros (God with Us Baptist Church) in El Paso County, Texas, prepare to worship in their renovated worship center — formerly a bar. (BP photo)

Just for the Record



CALHOUN CHURCH, HOT COFFEE, hosted former pastor Jeff Thomas (second from right) and his wife Karen (right) for Foreign Missions Awareness Sunday. Pictured with the Thomases are pastor and Mrs. Daryl Coats.



NEW HOME CHURCH, BAY SPRINGS, children delivered Christmas stockings filled with goodies to elderly people in the community.



TRINITY CHURCH, FULTON, men's choir sang in recognition of Baptist Men's Day. David Haynes, pastor. Barry Bouchillon, associate pastor of worship.



SHILOH CHURCH AND WANILLA CHURCH ladies were one of the groups of performers at the multi-church Fifth Sunday worship service.

In other Church News:

➤ **Calvary Church, Natheez**, will host the Kingsmen in concert at 6 p.m. on March 25. Free admission. A love offering will be taken. Timmy Cloy, pastor.

➤ **Meadow Grove Church, Brandon**, will host Triumphant Quartet on Feb. 19 at 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. For more information, call (601) 260-7114.

➤ **Magnolia Church, Laurel**, will hold Homecoming on March 5, beginning at 10:30 a.m., with lunch to follow. A time capsule buried 25 years ago will be opened. Frank Harmon, speaker. Gloria Ladner, music. For more information, contact the church office at (601) 649-5660.

➤ **Pineview Church, Hattiesburg**, will host the sixth annual open car show benefit for the Deanash campus of the Baptist Children's Village from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. on April 29. Registration from 8-10 a.m. is \$25. Free meal to the public. Music provided by Damascus Road. For more information, contact Stan Anderson at (601) 467-1138. E-mail: andersonstanley58@gmail.com.

➤ **Unity Church, Moselle**, will host a one-night rally/special event featuring evangelist and motivational speaker David Ring, beginning at 6 p.m. on Feb. 18. For more information, call (601) 583-3905.

➤ **Pearlhaven Church, Brookhaven**, will host a Fifth Sunday Singing on March 26 at 5 p.m., featuring the group Calm Assurance of Marion County and followed by a meal in the fellowship hall. A love offering will be taken.



FIRST CHURCH, SUMRALL, ordained Reed McDaniel (center) to the Gospel ministry on Jan. 22. He currently serves as minister to students at the church. Reed was joined by his wife Lynsey (left) and senior pastor Philip Cooper.



FLORA CHURCH, FLORA, senior adult group Joyful Noise performed 20 favorite hymns on Feb. 2 for the residents of The Nichols Center in Madison.



GILLSBURG CHURCH, OSYKA, "knocked out" the sanctuary expense. Taking part in the note burning were Bailey Hughes, Ian Stephens, Dennis Wilson, and Daniel Williams. Observing from were music director Charles Carruth and pastor Victor Walsh.



BLUFF SPRINGS CHURCH recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of interim pastor Billy Ray Simmons' ordination as a minister of the Gospel. He is flanked by his children, Sharon Leshe (left) and Anthony Simmons.

Analysis: Documentary confronts Genesis questions

By Phil Boatwright
Correspondent

Based on the account in Genesis, some believe God created everything in six days. Others believe the universe came about during billions of years of conception. Many busy with life don't take the time to consider either scenario.



BOATWRIGHT

No matter what people believe, something obviously happened and some scholars say the first book of the Bible does contain solid, historical answers to what in fact happened in the beginning.

The upcoming investigative documentary, *Is Genesis History?*, from Compass Cinema offers an evidence-based argument for the historical and scientific reliability of Genesis. Several doctors of philosophy in the fields of geology, biology, astronomy, and archeology are interviewed throughout the film, signifying that there are learned men and women of science who consider God's Word not just a spiritual guidepost, but true historical fact.

This investigative documentary is hosted by Ted Tackett, who served more than 20 years in the U.S. Air Force and was appointed director of technical planning for the National Security Council by President George H.W. Bush.

Tackett holds a doctor of management degree from Colorado Technical University in

Colorado Springs; a master of science from Auburn University in Auburn, AL; and a bachelor of science from Kansas State University in Manhattan. His many published works include writings on issues related to culture and worldviews.

It is his duty in the film to prompt or introduce several colleagues, all of whom possess equally impressive curriculum vitae.

One simple statement stands out in the production and ignites a powerful conversation concerning the hows and whys of our existence: "Time is not a magic wand that explains all geological questions." The statement is a potent rebuff of the academic elite who remain devoted to the flawed theory of the Big Bang.

The evolutionist doesn't believe the story of Creation. Maybe he doesn't want to believe it. Does he deny spirituality or define it in an abstract manner to avoid contemplating a God to whom everyone must answer? Whatever his reason, he simply cannot accept the creationist's hypothesis.

Even sadder are those who focus on the here and now, avoiding contemplation of the past or eternal future. They take no time to consider what caused some atoms to become mountains, while others took the form of oceans. They are appeased by a dictated classroom theory that stresses the making of man was accidental.

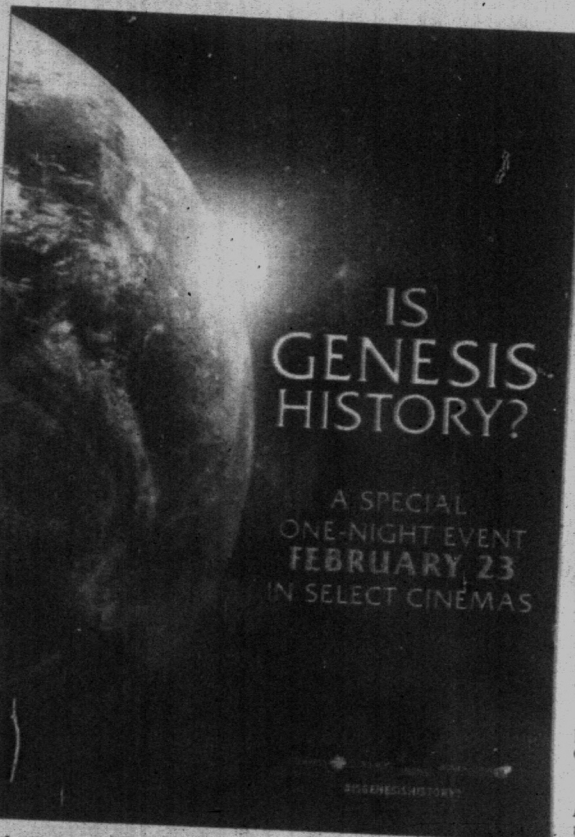
The Big Bang and evolution are the central teachings found in academia's secularized science classes, despite the fact that ultimately it takes as much

faith (maybe more) to believe creation happened by mishap as by a Designer.

Unfairly, only one view is allowed a voice in today's public school classroom. There is a need

for Christian scientists and filmmakers to boldly go where no secularist will.

Following in the steps of films such as *The Genesis Code*, *The Case for Faith*, and *Expelled*:



No Intelligence Allowed, the upcoming documentary proposes thoughtful answers to complex questions:

- Was the universe created in six literal days?
- Did humans evolve?
- Were Adam and Eve real?
- Was there a global flood?
- What happened to the dinosaurs?

We Christians have our scientists. The non-believers have theirs. Whose opinion will you trust? Which paradigm do you want to embrace? I suggest you see the film. It will leave believers emboldened and may cause skeptics to reexamine their views.

This well-made documentary gave me one more confirmation that faith is not blind.

Is Genesis History? will be shown one night only, Feb. 23, in more than 600 theaters nationwide.

Following the film, there will be a moderated on-screen discussion with Tackett and a panel of scientists and theologians regarding Genesis' impact on Christians today. A DVD will be released but the date has not been announced.

More information about the production is available at IsGenesisHistory.com.

In addition to writing for Baptist Press, Boatwright reviews films at moviereporter.com and is a regular contributor to *The World and Everything In It*, a weekly radio program from WORLD News Group. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style and clarity.

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DATE	TIME	COUNTY/CITY	LOCATION
Feb. 20	10 a.m.	Panola / Batesville	Pavilion on the Square-Downtown
Feb. 20	noon	Yalobusha / Water Valley	Civic Center
Feb. 20	2 p.m.	Yalobusha / Coffeeville	Public Bandstand
Feb. 21	10 a.m.	Grenada / Grenada	Grenada County Courthouse Square
Feb. 21	noon	Tallahatchie / Charleston	Tallahatchie Co. Courthouse Square
Feb. 21	2 p.m.	Tallahatchie / Sumner	Tallahatchie Co. Courthouse Square
Feb. 23	9 a.m.	Holmes / Lexington	First Baptist Church
Feb. 23	11 a.m.	Humphreys / Belzoni	Humphreys County Courthouse
Feb. 23	2 p.m.	Washington / Greenville	Greenville Christian School Gym
Feb. 27	9 a.m.	Attala / Kosciusko	Attala County Courthouse Lawn
Feb. 27	11 a.m.	Choctaw / Ackerman	Ackerman Baptist Church
Feb. 27	2 p.m.	Noxubee / Macon	Noxubee County Courthouse
Feb. 27	4 p.m.	Winston / Louisville	First Baptist Church
Feb. 28	10 a.m.	Pike / McComb	Percy Quinn State Park Lodge
Feb. 28	noon	Lincoln / Brookhaven	Lincoln County Courthouse
Feb. 28	2 p.m.	Copiah / Hazlehurst	Gallman Rodeo Arena Building
Mar. 6	11 a.m.	Prentiss / Booneville	Steps of City Hall
Mar. 6	2 p.m.	Tishomingo / Iuka	Iuka Mineral Springs Park
Mar. 7	11 a.m.	Benton / Ashland	Benton County Courthouse
Mar. 7	2 p.m.	Tippah / Ripley	Tippah County Courthouse
Mar. 7	4 p.m.	Union / New Albany	Magnolia Civic Center

VISIT WWW.MBCB.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION

as this, all of us in the Union University community immediately began reaching out to colleagues there.

"We have shared information and ideas, answered questions and been available should there be any need for further assistance, and we will work shoulder-to-shoulder with them as they rebuild."

Anderson University in Anderson, S.C., affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention in Columbia, has made William Carey a campus prayer emphasis, is collecting donations for the rebuilding effort, and plans to send a disaster relief team to help.

Wes Brashier, Anderson's vice president for Christian life, told BP, "We at Anderson University realize that our Christian community is part of a much larger Christian community of believers. We want to be the kind of people who reach out to our brothers and sisters in a time of need because we believe that's what the Lord would have us to do."

Other Southern Baptist-related institutions who have announced plans to assist WCU include

■ Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

■ Mississippi College in Clinton, affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

■ Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ar., affiliated with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention in Little Rock.

■ University of Mobile in Mobile, Al., affiliated with the Alabama Baptist Convention in Montgomery.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention sent William Carey "an immediate significant gift to assist the international students and missionary kids," the uni-

versity told BP. National Woman's Missionary Union "sent a significant gift for student support," the university said.

The Mississippi Baptist Foundation, an agency of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, has also contributed \$25,000 to the cause.

King told the Hattiesburg American newspaper that WCU will not accept any federal funds during its rebuild, in order to speed the process and avoid any restriction of Christ-centered programs that could accompany acceptance of government money.

Of the five buildings designated for demolition, two already have been razed — an anatomy lab building associated with the College of Osteopathic Medicine and an art gallery/apartment building. Two dormitories and the administration building are slated for demolition.

Among the razed buildings will be Tatum Court, the oldest campus structure dating to 1914. The university has announced plans to construct a new Tatum Court in its place.

Courses for the spring trimester will proceed as planned, with many classes on campus, some moving online, and some at alternate locations in the Hattiesburg area such as the nearby University of Southern Mississippi and local churches. All winter trimester classes are being completed online or in alternate locations.

More than 700 pieces of artwork from the campus have been saved with help from the Lauren Rodgers Museum of Art in Laurel, local television station WDAM reported. Some of the same pieces were saved in 2005 following campus damage from Hurricane Katrina.

MS POSITIONS

CASON BAPTIST CHURCH IN NETTLETON, MS IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME SENIOR PASTOR. Interested candidates can email resumes to Casonpastorsearch@gmail.com

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH IN BRANDON, MS IS LOOKING FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO HELP FURTHER OUR MISSION AND SUPPORT THE MINISTRIES OF THE church. Full time (36 hrs/wk). Please email your resume to ryan@gracebaptistonline.net.

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VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH OF MATHISTON, MS, IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR. Please Submit resumes to P.O. Box 12 Mathiston, Ms. 39750.

NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH FLORENCE, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER. Please send Resume to Worship Search Committee P.O. box 1882 Florence, Ms 39073 or Email to Preacher7248@gmail.com.

LINCOLN ASSOCIATION: VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH IS SEEKING A PART-TIME YOUTH PASTOR. Please send Resumes to Victory Baptist Church 1411 Mallaleu Dr SE Brookhaven, MS 39601.

NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH, LOCATED IN SOUTHERN LAUDERDALE COUNTY, MS, IN THE CLARKDALE COMMUNITY, IS AN ACTIVELY GROWING CHURCH. We are prayerfully seeking to fill a new full time staff position of Associate Pastor of Education and Families. Those who are passionate for God and passionate about developing and ministering to church families, please email a resume to nbcassocpastorsearch@gmail.com.

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Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0630. FAX: (601) 282-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God

in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS FOR FEBRUARY 19, 2017

Faith Through Failures • Ruth 1:6-18

Did you know there were two Bethlehem's? No? I didn't either. In Joshua, we read about the inheritance of the children of Zebulun. Twelve cities are listed including Bethlehem, located seven miles east of Nazareth (Joshua 19:15, NKJV). However, the city best known as Bethlehem is in Judah and located about five miles south of Jerusalem. This was the birthplace of Jesus and David and also known as Bethlehem Judah, Bethlehem Ephratah, and the city of David.

Bethlehem Judah was the city where Elimelech and Naomi lived with their sons Mahlon and Chilion. Due to a famine, Elimelech chose to take his family to Moab. This was an interesting decision because there is no indication that God told them to leave Bethlehem, better known as the house of bread. One commentary even suggests that they lost God's divine protection when they moved to Moab.

A Desperate Return – Ruth 1:6-10

Within about ten years, Elimelech died; Mahlon married Ruth; Chilion married Orpah; and then the two sons died. What once was a family of six became a family of three widows. Bereft of her husband and two sons, Naomi decided to leave Moab and return to her homeland Judah. Her daughters-in-law accompanied Naomi as she began her journey to Judah. Naomi encouraged them to return to their homeland

where they could remarry. The daughters-in-law continued to journey with Naomi.

A Bitter Plea – Ruth 1:11-14

In biblical days, a woman was dependent on her husband. If her husband died, she had few options. One choice was levirate marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5-16. Levirate is taken from the word "levir" which means "a husband's brother." If a man died without a son, the widow was not supposed to marry outside the family.

Instead, one of his brothers would marry the widow so that the man would have heirs. Since both brothers died, Ruth and Orpah did not have another to marry. The second choice for a widow was to return to her own family and possibly remarry. Naomi pled with her daughters-in-law to return to their parent's households. She reminded them that she would not be able to provide for them. Orpah tearfully heeded Naomi's plea.

A Lifelong Promise – Ruth 1:15-18

Ruth remained committed to going

with Naomi even though she challenged Ruth's decision to remain with her. Listen to Ruth's words, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (vv. 16-17). Instead of returning to her own family and their pagan gods, Ruth

declared her allegiance to Naomi and Naomi's God – Yahweh. What seemed like such a tragedy became a beautiful story of love

and commitment.

As we can see from the story of Naomi and Ruth, God's plans sometimes involve enduring difficulties and making hard decisions. Believers can remain confident that God is worthy of our trust even when we are facing difficulties in life. When my husband Mark died ten months ago, I was only fifty-eight. I never dreamed I would be a widow at that age. With his passing came many

hard decisions. How was I going to pay the bills? Would I have to move? Where was I going to find a job? I wish I could tell you that I was always confident that God would take care of me. Sadly, my faith and trust rose and fell as I travelled on this widow's roller coaster. There were times when grief overtook me and all I could do was cry out my struggles before God. However, God was faithful to watch over me and provide for me. He was worthy of my trust. I have learned that God can use life's tragedies to bring about His purposes.

NOTE: The Moabites were descendants of Lot. Following the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, Lot and his two daughters moved from Zoar to the mountains and lived in a cave. The daughters conspired to sleep with their father so they would have children. Both daughters became pregnant. The eldest daughter named her son Moab. The younger daughter named her son Ben-Ammi (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites and Ammonites became enemies of Israel and also introduced the Moabite god Baal and the Ammonite god Molech to the Israelites.

McGraw is development director of Crossroads SW Counseling Center, a conference speaker, life coach, and member of Woodville Church.

Explore the Bible

with Liz McGraw



Practicing Joy • Philippians 4:4-9

"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice," Philippians 4:4 (KJV). That first phrase "Rejoice in the Lord always" is exactly word for word the same in the King James Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, New International Version, American Standard Version, Modern English Version, New American Standard Bible and several other translations and versions. The whole verse, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4 (HCSB) is very similar in nearly all major and/or dependable translation. Paul makes a very clear and easily understood statement about a central truth of Christ followers through the ages and all around the world.

Everyone who understands what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, has reason to rejoice or as our lesson title states, live "Practicing Joy." The Greek word "chairō" is the word being translated rejoice in verse 4. "Chairō" is also translated as joy often. "Chairō" joy is used in all four chapters of Philippi as by the prisoner Paul to explain his basic state of mind and life style.

Practicing joy will lead to a gracious life-style that can be seen by everyone. ["Let your graciousness be known to everyone," Philippians 4:5a (HCSB)] This graciousness is enabled when we realize "The Lord is near," Philippians 4:5b (HCSB). While this gracious lifestyle can be seen by every-

one not everyone will accept or appreciate it. But because the Lord is near, we will be blessed if we live this gracious lifestyle.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us about the possibility of persecution for living close to God:

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake," Matthew 5:11 (KJV).

They persecuted and crucified Jesus by saying all manner of evil against Him falsely. The letter to the Philippians said, "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God," Philippians 4:6 (HCSB). You may have experienced times when you were not certain how to pray or what petition could lead to thanksgiving.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us a tremendous promise of what God will do when prayer, petition, and thanksgiving are very hard. Read this promise: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will," Romans 8:26-27 (NIV).

"This praying in God's will, will lead to this result, "And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus," Philippians 4:7 (HCSB). Back in Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul asserts that: "And we

know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose," Ro-

Bible Studies for Life

with Don Hicks



mans 8:28 (KJV).

The mind and heart guarded by Christ Jesus lives a life that will lead to living in and practicing joy. Paul has a final teaching about peace and being in God's will. Listen to Paul's climatic teaching about God's call on our daily life. "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is

lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on the things," Philippians 4:8 (HCSB).

Paul teaches the same Christian lifestyle in Galatians 5 when he lists the fruit of Spirit (This is the same Spirit that will help us in prayer). Here is Paul's list of this fruit:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law," Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV).

In the Philippiian letter, he wants us to dwell on things that may need extra attention in 21st century America. What do you think, should we give renewed attention to moral excellence and praising God?

Specifically, Paul listed attending to truth, things that are honorable, and purity. Are American leaders tried and tested for personal purity? How about this Galatian list love, gentleness, goodness, meekness or temperance?

More importantly, how do you meet this test of moral excellence? Are you near the Lord as discussed in verse 5 of our focal passage? Consider this close to the passage, "Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you," Philippians 4:9 (HCSB).

Hicks is associational missions director for Jasper Association in Bay Springs.

GORSUCH

cont. from p. 1

of intellectually robust conservatism, judicial restraint, and faithfulness to the Constitution. Gorsuch's confirmation to the high court seemingly will be

a battle, based on the response of Senate Democratic leadership to his nomination.

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D.-N.Y.), the Senate minority leader, said he has "very serious doubts about Judge Gorsuch's ability" to be independent and non-ideological, to "preserve

our democracy [and] protect fundamental rights," and stand up to the strong-willed Trump.

According to The Hill, the New York senator, who voted in favor of Gorsuch's nomination to the federal appeals court post ten years ago, now says Democrats will "require an exhaus-

tive, robust, and comprehensive debate on Judge Gorsuch's fitness" for the court.

In announcing Gorsuch's nomination from the White House, Trump said the judge's qualifications "are beyond dispute" and urged Republican and Democratic senators to

come together for the country's good.

Republicans have only a 52-48 seat majority in the Senate, with 60 votes needed to stop a Democrat filibuster or another parliamentary maneuver for Gorsuch's nomination to move forward.



HONOR ROLL OF CHURCHES

Each January, The Baptist Children's Village evaluates the cash gifts received from churches during the previous twelve months. In this evaluation, it has become customary to publish the Mississippi Baptist churches giving \$1,000 and above in descending order of designated cash gifts. This does not include non-cash gift items or volunteer efforts that many churches contribute. This analysis has become known as the "Honor Roll of Churches."

Sean A. Milner, Executive Director

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Clinton, MS 39001-8001

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www.baptistchildrensvillage.com

RANK	CHURCH NAME	CITY	ASSOCIATION	2016 GIFTS
1	Morrison Heights Baptist Church	Clinton	Metro	\$34,445.69
2	Oak Grove Baptist Church	Mendenhall	Simpson	\$28,129.32
3	Hardy Baptist Church	Grenada	North Central	\$28,065.14
4	First Baptist Church Water Valley	Water Valley	Yalobusha	\$22,360.00
5	First Baptist Church Vicksburg	Vicksburg	Warren	\$21,934.64
6	Bunker Hill Baptist Church	Columbia	Warren	\$19,769.30
7	Brandon Baptist Church	Brandon	Rankin	\$15,398.00
8	First Baptist Church Corinth	Corinth	Alcorn	\$14,661.88
9	First Baptist Church Kosciusko	Kosciusko	Attala	\$13,853.15
10	Seminary Baptist Church	Seminary	Covington-Jefferson Davis	\$13,660.00
11	First Baptist Church Richmon	Richmon	Attala	\$13,390.00
12	Epiphany Baptist Church	Bogue Chitto	Perry	\$12,300.00
13	First Baptist Church Crystal Springs	Crystal Springs	Copiah	\$12,149.64
14	Fellowship Baptist Church	Meridian	Laurel	\$11,190.00
15	First Baptist Church Batesville	Batesville	Laurel	\$11,087.02
16	First Baptist Church Clinton	Clinton	Perry	\$10,396.34
17	West Laurel Baptist Church	West Laurel	Rankin	\$10,355.87
18	First Baptist Church Florence	Florence	Rankin	\$10,275.00
19	Memorial Baptist Church	Memorial	Wayne	\$10,100.56
20	Trinity Baptist Church	Trinity	Wayne	\$10,006.15
21	Gaston Baptist Church	Gaston	Wayne	\$9,999.96
22	Williamsville Baptist Church	Williamsville	Wayne	\$9,908.66
23	East Philadelphia Baptist Church	Philadelphia	Neshoba	\$9,641.17
24	Trinity Baptist Church	Vicksburg	Neshoba	\$8,510.23
25	Spring Creek Baptist Church	Spring Creek	Simpson	\$8,311.53
26	Dry Creek Baptist Church	Dry Creek	Warren	\$8,273.34
27	First Baptist Church Raymond	Raymond	Warren	\$8,080.51
28	Topoka Baptist Church	Topoka	Warren	\$8,000.00
29	First Baptist Church Jackson	Jackson	Warren	\$7,890.71
30	Murphy Creek Baptist Church	Murphy Creek	Warren	\$7,738.27
31	First Baptist Church Senatobia	Senatobia	Warren	\$7,604.86
32	Kennel Baptist Church	Kennel	Warren	\$7,674.77
33	Valden Baptist Church	Valden	Warren	\$7,513.61
34	First Baptist Church Yazoo City	Yazoo City	Warren	\$7,500.00
35	First Baptist Church Senatobia	Senatobia	Warren	\$7,400.00
36	Pine Forest Baptist Church	Pine Forest	Warren	\$7,216.14
37	First Baptist Church Magee	First Baptist	Warren	\$7,146.00
38	Mount Moriah Baptist Church	Mount Moriah	Warren	\$7,141.24
39	Sand Hill Baptist Church	Sand Hill	Warren	\$7,132.46
40	First Baptist Church Laurel	First Baptist	Warren	\$7,020.96
41	Holcomb Baptist Church	Holcomb	Warren	\$7,010.00
42	First Baptist Church Brookhaven	Brookhaven	Warren	\$6,919.52
43	Drew Baptist Church	Drew	Warren	\$6,622.82
44	Sylvan Baptist Church	Sylvan	Warren	\$6,567.87
45	First Baptist Church Greenville	First Baptist	Warren	\$6,530.00
46	First Baptist Church Abbeville	Abbeville	Warren	\$6,468.00
47	Tuscola Baptist Church	Tuscola	Warren	\$6,399.06
48	Hiatt Baptist Church	Hiatt	Warren	\$6,399.06
49	Ingomar Baptist Church	Ingomar	Warren	\$6,361.00
50	Bedford Baptist Church	Bedford	Warren	\$6,266.52
51	North Greenwood Baptist Church	North Greenwood	Warren	\$6,181.00
52	First Baptist Church Louisville	First Baptist	Warren	\$6,163.00
53	First Baptist Church Hazlehurst	First Baptist	Warren	\$6,096.10
54	First Baptist Church Newton	First Baptist	Warren	\$6,069.91
55	First Baptist Church Lambert	First Baptist	Warren	\$6,065.24
56	Hurricane Creek Baptist Church	Hurricane Creek	Warren	\$6,055.00
57	Springfield Baptist Church	Springfield	Warren	\$6,000.00
58	West Jackson Street Church	West Jackson	Warren	\$5,985.05
59	Trinity Baptist Church	Trinity	Warren	\$5,931.36
60	Indian Springs Baptist Church	Indian Springs	Warren	\$5,937.68
61	New Hope Baptist Church	New Hope	Warren	\$5,891.00
62	Northwest Baptist Church	Northwest	Warren	\$5,878.54
63	Valley Grove Baptist Church	Valley Grove	Warren	\$5,794.82
64	North Oxford Baptist Church	North Oxford	Warren	\$5,763.65
65	First Baptist Church Madison	First Baptist	Warren	\$5,700.00
66	Bozina Baptist Church	Bozina	Warren	\$5,595.73
67	County Line Baptist Church	County Line	Warren	\$5,539.00
68	Anchor Baptist Church	Anchor	Warren	\$5,511.82
69	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,477.22
70	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,470.28
71	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,426.21
72	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,396.27
73	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,300.00
74	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,272.21
75	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,240.28
76	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,209.21
77	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,173.25
78	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,140.00
79	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,133.46
80	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,127.65
81	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,102.35
82	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,100.00
83	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,092.28
84	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$5,000.00
85	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,986.94
86	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,901.21
87	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,900.10
88	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,845.65
89	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,839.76
90	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,800.00
91	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,753.75
92	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,747.08
93	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,683.20
94	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,617.22
95	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,600.00
96	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,580.00
97	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,533.36
98	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,514.00
99	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,313.30
100	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,300.00
101	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,300.00
102	Lebanon Baptist Church	Lebanon	Warren	\$4,300.00

103	Broadmoor Baptist Church	Madison	Metro	\$4,487.00
104	First Baptist Church Sardis	Sardis	Panola	\$4,469.07
105	First Baptist Church Quilman	Quilman	Clarke	\$4,450.00
106	First Baptist Church Booneville	Booneville	Prentiss	\$4,365.00
107	Calvary Baptist Church	Waynesboro	Wayne	\$4,314.91
108	Fairview Baptist Church	Columbus	Golden Triangle	\$4,300.00
109	First Baptist Church Lyman	Gulfport	Gulf Coast	\$4,282.00
110	North Winona Baptist Church	Winona	Montgomery	\$4,217.10
111	Mount Zion Baptist Church	Meridian	Golden Triangle	\$4,217.10
112	Westwood Baptist Church	Oxford	Wayne	\$4,183.61
113	First Baptist Church Oxford	Philadelphia	Collaborative	\$4,178.92
114	Trinity Baptist Church	Bogue Chitto	Wayne	\$4,169.57
115	Calvary Baptist Church	Calderon	Golden Triangle	\$4,166.70
116	Kolola Springs Baptist Church	Gulfport	Gulf Coast	\$4,113.36
117	Grace Memorial Baptist Church	New Albany	Union	\$4,055.42
118	First Baptist Church New Albany	Belzoni	Humphreys	\$3,949.93
119	First Baptist Church Belzoni	Louisville	Wayne	\$3,921.00
120	Shiloh Baptist Church	Clinton	Rankin	\$3,871.90
121	First Baptist Church Brandon	Rolling Fork	Sharkey-Issaquena	\$3,835.64
122	Deer Creek Baptist Church	Carthage	Wayne	\$3,800.00
123	Rocky Point Baptist Church	Leake	Laurel	\$3,773.72
124	Faith Baptist Church	New Line	Wayne	\$3,751.54
125	First Baptist Church State Line	Crystal Springs	Copiah	\$3,738.17
126	New Zion Baptist Church	Philadelphia	North Central	\$3,632.21
127	Phillip Baptist Church	Meridian	Laurel	\$3,621.21
128	Beacon Street Baptist Church	Meridian	Clarke	\$3,608.00
129	Midway Baptist Church	Buckatunga	Wayne	\$3,600.60
130	Bucatanua Baptist Church	Bucatanua	Wayne	\$3,580.00
131	First Baptist Church Charleston	Charleston	North Central	\$3,571.81
132	First Baptist Church Union	Union	Newton	\$3,528.36
133	Carthage Baptist Church	Maagee	Simpson	\$3,520.00
134	Newhebron Baptist Church	Newhebron	Wayne	\$3,500.00
135	Highland Baptist Church	Vicksburg	Lawrence	\$3,476.45
136	Oakland Baptist Church	Corinth	Alcorn	\$3,425.00
137	Rolling Creek Baptist Church	Quilman	Clarke	\$3,421.20
138	Meadville Baptist Church	Meadville	Franklin	\$3,419.54
139	First Baptist Church Picayune	Picayune	Pearl River	\$3,378.50
140	Central Baptist Church	McNeill	Pearl River	\$3,350.00
141	Spring Hill Baptist Church	Waterford	Collaborative	\$3,342.57
142	Illcrest Baptist Church	Byram	Metro	\$3,300.54
143	Ocoiba Baptist Church	Philadelphia	At-Large	\$3,275.00
144	Ackerman Baptist Church	Ackerman	Choctaw	\$3,262.00
145	Montevista Baptist Church	Eupora	Wayne	\$3,250.00
146	Ruleville Baptist Church	Ruleville	Webster	\$3,250.00
147	Mount Zion Baptist Church	Meridian	At-Large	\$3,246.90
148	Chucky Baptist Church	Chucky	Clarke	\$3,243.58
149	Beulah Baptist Church	Inverness	Newton	\$3,215.00
150	Holly Baptist Church	Cosmitt	Humphreys	\$3,208.48
151	Liberty Baptist Church	New Albany	Alcorn	\$3,202.04
152	Goodwater Baptist Church	Maagee	Union	\$3,191.00
153	Crystal Ridge Baptist Church	Louisville	Wayne	\$3,141.51
154	New Hope Baptist Church	Gulfport	Winston	\$3,141.51
155	Eloy Baptist Church	Macon	Gulf Coast	\$3,133.00
156	Bethel Baptist Church	Poplarville	Noxubee	\$3,101.84
157	Wildwood Baptist Church	Clinton	Pearl River	\$3,100.00
158	West Kemper Baptist Church	DeKalb	Kemper	\$3,082.44
159	Jesus Baptist Church	Forest	Scott	\$3,031.51
160	Gray Creek Baptist Church	Hernando	X-Tended	\$3,000.00
161	First Baptist Church Eupora	Eupora	Webster	\$3,000.00
162	First Baptist Church Grenada	Grenada	North Central	\$2,986.09
163	DeSoto Baptist Church	Shubuta	Wayne	\$2,975.08
164	Brentzner Baptist Church	Bassfield	Covington-Jefferson Davis	\$2,915.00
165	Oak Grove Baptist Church	Bentonla	Yazoo	\$2,905.38
166	Cairo Baptist Church	Louisville	Pontotoc	\$2,899.02
167	Harmony Baptist Church	Corinth	Winston	\$2,869.93
168	Wheeler Grove Baptist Church	Louisville	Alcorn	\$2,857.28
169	Antioch Baptist Church	Louisville	Jasper	\$2,856.21
170	Central Baptist Church	Bentonla	Yazoo	\$2,850.00
171	Calvary Baptist Church	Batesville	Panola	\$2,850.00
172	Phyllis Baptist Church	Prentiss	Covington-Jefferson Davis	\$2,850.00
173	Elision Ridge Baptist Church	Louisville	Winston	\$2,840.04
174	Berna Baptist Church	McCool	At-Large	\$2,835.00
175	Bogue Chitto Baptist Church	Bogue Chitto	Lincoln	\$2,833.35
176	Mount Pisgah Baptist Church	Camollton	Carroll	\$2,825.05
177	Tommolton Baptist Church	Eupora	Webster	\$2,822.27
178	West End Baptist Church	West Point	Golden Triangle	\$2,798.49
179	Tangipahoa Baptist Church	Summit	Pike	\$2,791.36
180	Shiloh Baptist Church	Port Gibson	Union	\$2,781.54
181	Pleasant Hill Baptist Church	Quilman	Clarke	\$2,766.40
182	Friendship Baptist Church	Stungis	Wayne	\$2,735.81
183	Macdonia Baptist Church	Brookhaven	Golden Triangle	\$2,733.34
184	Harmony Baptist Church	Walnut	Lincoln	\$2,710.83
185	Macedonia Baptist Church	Tupelo	Benton-Tippah	\$2,708.29
186	Bluff Springs Baptist Church	DeKalb	Lee	\$2,668.00
187	Beulah Baptist Church	Maagee	Kemper	\$2,660.00
188	New Bethel Baptist Church	Simpson	Simpson	\$2,650.00
189	Indian Springs Baptist Church	Carroll	Carroll	\$2,640.88
190	Padway Baptist Church	Petal	Wayne	\$2,628.48
191	Chesterville Baptist Church	Kosciusko	At-Large	\$2,605.00
192	Remus Baptist Church	Tupelo	Lee	\$2,603.22
193	Calvary Baptist Church	Carthage	Leake	\$2,599.04
194	Temple Baptist Church	Corinth	Alcorn	\$2,593.00
195	Moak's Creek Baptist Church	Hattiesburg	Pine Belt	\$2,540.73
196	Crowder Baptist Church	Summit	Wayne	\$2,530.00
197	Pineview Baptist Church	Crowder	North Delta	\$2,527.00
198	West Ripley Baptist Church	Laurel	Jones	\$2,521.43
199	Star Baptist Church	Stax	Benton-Tippah	\$2,520.52
200	Morrison Chapel Baptist Church	Cleveland	Rankin	\$2,520.00
201	Arm Baptist Church	Silver Creek	Mid-Delta	\$2,516.00
202	Mount Zion Baptist Church-Tate	Independence	Lawrence	\$2,515.00
203	Rosworth Baptist Church	Foxworth	X-Tended	\$2,512.88
204	First Baptist Church Long Beach	Long Beach	Marion	\$2,500.00
205	Skene Baptist Church	Skene	Gulf Coast	\$2,499.00
206	Sallis Baptist Church	Sallis	Mid-Delta	\$2,490.00
207	Longview Baptist Church	Belden	At-Large	\$2,481.94
208	Gatesville Baptist Church	Crystal Springs	Pontotoc	\$2,478.94
209	Carterville Baptist Church	Petal	Copiah	\$2,472.00
210	Devoto Hills Baptist Church	Southaven	Pine Belt	\$2,461.37
211	Calvary Baptist Church	Greenwood	X-Tended	\$2,450.00
212	Oldtown Baptist Church	Pittsboro	Mid-Delta	\$2,443.46
213	Union Baptist Church	Meridian	Calhoun	\$2,441.45
214	Clear Springs Baptist Church	Lowin	Clarke	\$2,418.00
215	Hickory Ridge Baptist Church	Flomora	Smith	\$2,413.08
216	French Camp Baptist Church	French Camp	Rankin	\$2,412.58
217	First Baptist Church Madison	Philadelp	Choctaw	\$2,412.15
218	Bethesda Baptist Church	Philadelp	Webster	\$2,408.99
219	Evergreen Baptist Church	Louisville	Neshoba	\$2,405.00
220	Union Baptist Church	Wayne	Winston	\$2,400.00
221	Brewer Baptist Church	Wayne	Smith	\$2,400.00
222	First Baptist Church Ita Bena	Wayne	Wayne	\$2,392.92
223	First Baptist Church Nettleton	Wayne	Lee	\$2,384.61
224	Oakvale Baptist Church	Wayne	At-Large	\$2,335.00
225	Tusculum Baptist Church	Oak Vale	Lawrence	\$2,325.00
226	Bay Springs Baptist Church	Oxford	Collaborative	\$2,305.56
227	Bay Street Baptist Church	Corinth	Alcorn	\$2,300.00
228	Fellowship Baptist Church	Bay Springs	Jasper	\$2,290.00
229	Union Baptist Church	Goodman	Holmes	\$2,285.00
230	Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Church	Ellisville	Jones	\$2,256.71
231	Enterprise Baptist Church	Picayune	Pearl River	\$2,240.50
232	Oak Forest Baptist Church	Meridian	Laurel	\$2,233.97
233	First Baptist Church Lumberton	Liberty	Mississippi	\$2,223.16
234	First Baptist Church Ripley	Liberty	Metro	\$2,221.01
235	Sylvan Baptist Church	Lumberton	Wayne	\$2,219.57
236	Woodman Baptist Church	Ripley	Benton-Tippah	\$2,208.49
237	Oak Hill Baptist Church	Wayne	Copiah	\$2,199.96
238	Bethlehem Baptist	Wayne	Gulf Coast	\$2,192.23
239		Wayne	Prentiss	\$2,176.30
240		Wayne	Wayne	\$2,159.16
241		Wayne	Wayne	\$2,155.60

242	First Baptist Church Coldwater	Coldwater	X-Tended	\$2,152.00	381	Macedonia Baptist Church	Byhalia	X-Tended	\$1,398.66
243	Cherry Creek Baptist Church	Pontotoc	Pontotoc	\$2,150.00	382	Harmony Baptist Church	Crytal Springs	Copiah	\$1,395.74
244	Neulah Baptist Church	Decatur	Neulah	\$2,146.00	383	West Heights Baptist Church	Pontotoc	Pontotoc	\$1,389.50
245	Furns Baptist Church	Pontotoc	Pontotoc	\$2,131.00	384	First Baptist Church Durant	Durant	Holmes	\$1,380.00
246	Arkabutla Baptist Church	Arkabutla	X-Tended	\$2,128.04	385	Courtland Baptist Church	Courtland	Panola	\$1,378.00
247	Mount Vernon Baptist Church	Tupelo	Lee	\$2,121.00	386	Good Hope Baptist Church	Philadelphina	Neshoba	\$1,368.00
248	Caueville Baptist Church	Meridian	Lauderdale	\$2,118.44	387	First Baptist Church Biloxi	Biloxi	Gulf Coast	\$1,365.00
249	Cedar Grove Baptist Church	Columbia	Marion	\$2,115.50	388	Tate Baptist Church	Carthage	Alcorn	\$1,357.00
250	First Baptist Church Terry	Terry	Metro	\$2,114.69	389	Water Oak Baptist Church	Waynesboro	Wayne	\$1,353.86
251	Casey Creek Baptist Church	Prentiss	Prentiss	\$2,108.64	390	Phelps Baptist Church	Golden Triangle	Golden Triangle	\$1,350.00
252	Carrollton Baptist Church	Carrollton	Carroll	\$2,101.37	391	Cumberland Baptist Church	Maben	Webster	\$1,350.00
253	Silver Springs Baptist Church	Oxyka	Pike	\$2,100.00	392	First Baptist Church, Coffeeville	Coffeeville	Webster	\$1,350.00
254	Christ Baptist Church	Greenwood	Mid-Delta	\$2,100.00	393	Highland Baptist Church	Magnolia	Yalabousha	\$1,350.00
255	Homesboro Baptist Church	Tchula	Holmes	\$2,100.00	394	First Baptist Church Bay St. Louis	Bay St. Louis	Metro	\$1,349.63
256	First Baptist Church Summer	Summer	North Central	\$2,099.50	395	Jacob's Well Inc.	Pass Christian	Gulf Coast	\$1,345.67
257	Leah River Baptist Church	Louis	Smith	\$2,096.00	396	Salem Baptist Church	Raleigh	Gulf Coast	\$1,330.80
258	First Baptist Church Cleveland	Cleveland	Mid-Delta	\$2,091.49	397	Bethel Baptist Church	Delta	Smith	\$1,328.86
259	Fellowship Baptist Church	Enterprise	Joseph	\$2,090.00	398	DeKalb Baptist Church	De Kalb	Union	\$1,311.00
260	Neshoba Baptist Church	Union	Neshoba	\$2,090.49	399	Camp Creek Baptist Church	Guntown	Kemper	\$1,310.00
261	Leah River Baptist Church	Collins	Covington-Jefferson Davis	\$2,090.00	400	Ludlow Baptist Church	Ludlow	Lee	\$1,307.36
262	Longview Point Baptist Church	Hernando	X-Tended	\$2,083.30	401	Oak Dale Baptist Church	Pontotoc	Scott	\$1,305.55
263	Shuqualak Baptist Church	Shuqualak	Noxubee	\$2,080.00	402	First Baptist Church Belmont	Belmont	Pontotoc	\$1,300.00
264	Good Hope Baptist Church	Mendenhall	Simpson	\$2,053.90	403	First Baptist Church Bruce	Bruce	Calhoun	\$1,300.00
265	Shiloh Baptist Church	Louisville	Winston	\$2,050.00	404	New Bethel Baptist Church	Philadelphina	Neshoba	\$1,300.00
266	Maranatha Baptist Church	Big Creek	Calhoun	\$2,049.31	405	Iuka Baptist Church	Iuka	Tishomingo	\$1,300.00
267	Walhall Baptist Church	Mount Olive	At-Large	\$2,035.73	406	Mount Zion Baptist Church	Oxyka	Pike	\$1,300.00
268	Mount Pleasant Baptist Church	Walhall	Webster	\$2,029.00	407	Cornerstone Baptist Church	Greenville	Washington	\$1,300.00
269	Leah River Baptist Church	Closter	Mississippi	\$2,017.31	408	Laurens Pleasant Baptist Church	Laurens	Holmes	\$1,300.00
270	Leah River Baptist Church	Leahville	Washington	\$2,000.00	409	Pulaski Baptist Church	Pulaski	Scott	\$1,293.76
271	Old Pearl Valley Baptist Church	Philadelphia	Neshoba	\$2,000.00	410	Montgomery Baptist Church	Summit	Lincoln	\$1,291.92
272	Tusculum Baptist Church	Booneville	Prentiss	\$2,000.00	411	Magee's Creek Baptist Church	Jayess	Walhall	\$1,279.87
273	Providence Baptist Church	Ackerman	Choctaw	\$2,000.00	412	Amaziah Baptist Church	Myrtle	Myrtle	\$1,265.00
274	Autumn Ridge Baptist Church	Hickman	Choctaw	\$2,000.00	413	Calvary Baptist Church	Holly Springs	Collaborative	\$1,259.81
275	Short Creek Baptist Church	Yazoo City	Yazoo	\$2,000.00	414	Second Baptist Church	Carthage	Leake	\$1,256.00
276	First Baptist Church Amory	Amory	Monroe	\$1,999.96	415	Wellman Baptist Church	Kosciusko	Attala	\$1,254.98
277	Arbor Grove Baptist Church	Houston	Chickasaw	\$1,995.00	416	Mount Olive Baptist Church	Bogue Chitto	Lincoln	\$1,252.00
278	Zion Hill Baptist Church	Blue Springs	Union	\$1,984.10	417	South Baptist Church	Smithdale	Mississippi	\$1,250.60
279	Carriage Hill Baptist Church	Forest	X-Tended	\$1,989.84	418	Mont Rose Baptist Church	Rankin	Clarke	\$1,245.49
280	Union Baptist Church	Sardis	Panola	\$1,958.76	419	New Palestine Baptist Church	Picayune	Pearl River	\$1,235.00
281	Salem Baptist Church	Golders	Itawamba	\$1,953.50	420	Hickory Baptist Church	Hickory	Newton	\$1,229.65
282	Mount Zion Baptist Church	Taylorville	Smith	\$1,950.00	421	Midway Baptist Church	Carthage	Leake	\$1,225.00
283	First Baptist Church Indianola	Indianola	Mid-Delta	\$1,934.19	422	Harperville Baptist Church	Harperville	Scott	\$1,224.00
284	Cornerstone Baptist Church	Batesville	Panola	\$1,923.28	423	Harmony Baptist Church	Quitman	Clarke	\$1,222.55

Spreading Gospel dangerous in many countries

RICHMOND, Va. (BP and local reports) — When a Sudanese court handed down a death sentence to Maryam Yahya Ibrahim for converting from Islam to Christianity, her case sparked international outcry. The young wife and expectant mother had been convicted of apostasy, a crime in Sudan.

Although the furor died down after her 2014 release, the law she was found guilty of violating remains on the books today — and continues to be enforced.

As recently as one month ago in Sudan, a group of men that included three teenagers was accused of apostasy for following the wrong version of Islam. Like Ibrahim, they are facing the death penalty.

Article 126 of the Sudanese Criminal Code makes conversion from Islam — apostasy — punishable by death. Article 125 classifies blasphemy as a crime.

Sudan's laws, based on Islamic Sharia law, demonstrate how legal codes can restrict both freedom of conscience — the freedom to believe according to your own conviction — and freedom to express disagreement with the tenets of a religion.

Together, apostasy and blasphemy laws punish conversion from a particular faith and often times the mere proclamation of any beliefs perceived as denigrating officially sanctioned beliefs.

Common occurrence

Sudan is not the only government with these kinds of laws. According to Pew Research, 26% of countries in the world today have anti-blasphemy laws and 13% have laws penalizing apostasy.

Afghanistan, Burma, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are just some of the countries that have anti-blasphemy laws used to target many different religious minorities, including Christians.

In Pakistan, a Christian named Aasiya Noreen was sentenced to death in 2009 for allegedly violating blasphemy laws. She



HAPPIER TIMES — Maryam Ibrahim (right) and Daniel Wani were married in 2011. Their union has produced two children, including the youngest born with little assistance during her mother's extended imprisonment in Pakistan for alleged apostasy from Islam following her profession of faith in Christ. Wani is also a Christian, and is a naturalized American citizen living in this country. (Uncredited photo)

remains in prison and in poor health. World Watch Monitor reported that Pakistan's Supreme Court in Islamabad delayed her appeal again this year.

The U.S. Commission for Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported, "More people are on death row or serving life sentences for blasphemy in Pakistan than in any other country in the world."

In 2014, seven of the 105 people charged with blasphemy under Sections 295 and 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code were Christians.

Crime and punishment

The impact of blasphemy and apostasy laws on society is much bigger than the number of official convictions implies. The laws create a climate in which conversion and witness to any faith different from the majority religion is not only socially marginalized, but is also a punishable crime. The consequence is that some radical citizens, almost always Muslims nursing grievances, come to feel

justified in taking the law into their own hands.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of State documented several horrifying incidents of vigilante enforcement of blasphemy laws in Pakistan:

■ Police narrowly prevented a crowd of hundreds from trying to burn a Christian accused of blasphemy in Lahore.

■ Police stopped a crowd from killing a Christian couple accused of blasphemy and arrested a Muslim cleric who attempted to incite the crowd to violence.

■ Civil society organizations reported police intervened to stop the burning of a Christian pastor and three other people from the province of Punjab.

When blasphemy laws are incorporated into the legal code of a society, repression of minority believers is systemic and officially legitimized.

Enforcement lacking

Many countries with anti-blasphemy and apostasy laws,

including Pakistan, claim to support freedom of religion because they protect the right of citizens to practice their faith within the religious communities into which they were born, but the enforcement of the laws at the local level demonstrates otherwise.

Alarming, USCIRF notes: "Aggressive enforcement of these laws emboldens the Pakistani Taliban and individual vigilantes, triggering horrific violence against religious communities and individuals perceived as transgressors, most recently Christians and Muslim bystanders on Easter Sunday 2016 in Lahore."

Inhibiting evangelism

Also concerning is the reality that blasphemy and apostasy laws are often open to broad interpretation by prosecutors, judges, and members of society who may consider any form of Christian evangelism to be blasphemy.

A report for the Law Library of Congress notes: "Apostasy laws are frequently used to charge persons for acts other than conversion. For example, in Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Yemen, individuals were charged with apostasy for their writings or comments made on social media."

These laws severely limit the exposure of people to the Gospel by making it dangerous and illegal for both foreign and local Christians to testify to their faith in person or online. Although these laws are most common in countries governed by Islamic Sharia law, they may be enacted in countries where ethnic nationalism is on the rise or where the government espouses one absolute ideology.

In effect, apostasy laws serve to constrain each individual to the religious conviction of his or her parents, or to the beliefs sanctioned by the government. A person has the freedom to believe and worship only within the tradition into which he or she is born.

Mourning for all

Christians should mourn with their persecuted brothers and sisters living under governments that repress freedom of religion. Followers of Christ should lift them up in prayer, advocate for them, and bring their cases before those with influence.

Sympathy shouldn't extend only to Christians in these countries. Christians should be equally heartbroken for the lost living under the control of governments that make it almost impossible for their citizens to hear a Gospel witness.

It's not surprising that countries where apostasy and blasphemy laws are in effect are home to some of the most unreached people groups in the world. Blasphemy and apostasy laws are one of the most impenetrable barriers to the spread of the Gospel.

Ways to help

Praying and advocacy for the repeal of apostasy and blasphemy laws that violate religious freedom and undermine human rights are ways Christians can help.

Christians can study the 2016 USCIRF Annual Report on International Religious Freedom or the Open Doors 2017 World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult to profess and practice the Christian faith.

Christians can read and pray through these reports, country by country, with a small group or church.

Christians can also give a voice to the voiceless by using social media to highlight specific cases of persecution and to advocate for the abolition of these types of apostasy or blasphemy laws worldwide.

Social media advocacy is one reason Maryam Ibrahim is alive today. The hashtag #SaveMeriam was trending during her ordeal, and more than a million online signatures were sent to the government of Sudan on her behalf.

Pakistan moves forward with Christian persecutions

LAHORE, Pakistan (BP) — A 70-year-old Christian in Pakistan was jailed on blasphemy charges on the same day 106 Muslims accused in a 2013 attack on a Christian colony were acquitted.

A mosque leader in the Bambanwali area north of Gujranwala, Punjab Province, on Jan. 28 accused Mukhtar Masih of writing two letters containing derogatory remarks about the Koran and Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, police records show.

He was charged with allegedly carrying out deliberate and malicious acts intending to outrage religious feelings, which

carries a sentence of 10 years in prison and/or a fine. He also was charged with allegedly making derogatory remarks against "holy personages," punishable by three years' imprisonment and/or fine.

Police raided Masih's house on Jan. 28 and took his entire family into custody, an area source told Morning Star News. "The police took with them Masih, his son, daughter, and three children. The family was later released on the intervention of rights outfits, but Masih was detained under blasphemy charges."

The source said the charges against Masih were fabricated

by local Muslims seeking to seize his property. Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often used to settle personal scores, according to the source, and Islamist groups and lawyers advocating the harshest punishments often apply pressure for convictions on police and courts.

Sawan Masih was sentenced to death on March 28, 2014. His appeal against the conviction is pending in the Lahore High Court.

Separately, a Christian facing the death penalty on blasphemy charges was granted bail by the Supreme Court on Feb. 1 because of gaps in the investigation of his case, sources said.



MUSLIM ANGER

— On March 9, 2013, thousands of rioters armed with sticks, clubs, and stones besieged Joseph Colony and torched houses and churches in the predominantly Christian neighborhood following allegations of blasphemy against a Christian, Sawan Masih. (BP photo courtesy of Morning Star News)